Problems faced by Indian software engineers in USA

*208. DR. C. NARAYANA REDDY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that in Silicon Valley, US., some software professionals who are out of job are facing many problems;

(b) if so, what are the approximate number of such software engineers from India; and

(c) what measures do Government propose to take for assisting such software engineers from india?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) and (b) There are approximately 300,000 Indian software professionals in Silicon Valley, USA, most of them extremely well-settled. Out of these, about 15,000 professionals, who were recruited by US companies specifically for Y2K related work in the latter half of 1999 are facing difficulties. With the onset of the year 2000, the technical requirement for which they were hired no longer exists.

Under the terms of their H-IB visas, since the software engineers were hired for a specific purpose, their continued stay in the US depend on availability of jobs in the US software industry for their particular skills. It is thus a function of the market and the specific qualification of the software engineers.

(c) The Indian Embassy in Washington and Consulate General of India in San Francisco are in touch with the software engineers through concerned Associations, to give all possible help and advice.

Exploration of Natural Gas **Reserve in Tripura**

*209. SHRI BRATTN SENGUPTA: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether any plan has been chalked out to explore the natural gas reserve in Tripura;

(b) what is the plan of action taken by Government in this regard;

(c) by when the project, if any, is likely to be completed; and

(d) if there is no such project, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI RAM NAIK): (a) to (c) Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Ltd. (ONGC) is carrying

out exploration for hydrocarbons in Tripura in accordance with the IX Plan programme, which envisaged drilling of twenty two exploratory wells and acquisition of 1010 Ground Line Kilometre (GLK) of 2D seismic data. Eight exploratory wells were drilled and 330 GLK of 2D seismic surveys were carried out by ONGC in Tripura from 1.4.97 till 1.1.2000.

(d) Does not arise.

Most Favoured Nation Status to Pakistan

*210. SHRI V.N. GADGIL: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government believe that Pakistan should be declared as a terrorist state;

(b) if so, why is Pakistan still accorded a Most Favoured Nation status despite no reciprocity;

(c) why has not the liberal visa regime for Pakistani visitors been terminated when its blatant misuse is well known; and

(d) what efforts have been made to have it declared as a terrorist state?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) to (d) The facts regarding Pakistan's state sponsorship of terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir and elsewhere in India have been effectively and appropriately brought before several international fora and have also been raised at high-level bilateral discussions with world leaders. The international community now openly recognises Pakistan's state sponsorship of terrorism and the impact this has on the security of the country and the region.

Contrary to its commitment under the WTO, Pakistan has not extended MFN treatment to India. While Government continue to meet its international trade obligations under its WTO commitments, they also continue to take all necessary actions to protect the country's trade interests vis-a-vis Pakistan.

Government is of the view that the promotion of people-to-people contacts between India and Pakistan contributes to its desire of establishing a relationship of peace, friendship and cooperation with that country. While pursuing such an approach, Government exercises due vigilance including in its visa policy for Pakistani nationals so that the security of the country is safeguarded.